

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 10, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

We want to thank you for your leadership on securing the southern border and commend the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) continued dedication to helping mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

As you are aware, states along the U.S.-Mexico border are experiencing a surge of COVID-19 cases. While Arizona, California, and Texas are leading the country daily in case numbers, the high concentration of positive percentages and even deaths in counties and localities directly along the southern border is astonishing. For example, last week, Hidalgo County, Texas (a heavily trafficked border crossing county) *alone* recorded more deaths than the daily total in all but six states¹. In every non-border state, we have seen trends of larger and denser counties reporting more deaths than smaller counties – however, that is not the case when comparing larger, denser counties in the state of Texas to Hidalgo County².

This is not a coincidence.

While we were pleased that DHS extended the restrictions for non-essential travel at our southern border until August 21, 2020, we believe more must be done to ensure that this policy is properly enforced and not subject to any loopholes. We fear that overly broad exemptions regarding what is deemed “essential travel” are impeding efforts to contain the spread of the virus, flooding our health care system along the border with medical tourists³, and are intrinsically linked to an uptick in COVID-19 cases along the U.S.-Mexico border. We urge you to pay renewed attention to this matter immediately.

¹ Daniel Horowitz, “One Texas-Mexico border county reported more deaths Tuesday than 44 states,” *Conservative Review*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.conservativereview.com/news/horowitz-one-texas-mexico-border-county-reported-deaths-tuesday-44-states/>.

² Daniel Horowitz, “Virus cases in border counties are surging, and the government hasn’t told us how many migrants are sick,” *Conservative Review*, July 14, 2020, <https://www.conservativereview.com/news/horowitz-virus-cases-border-counties-surging-government-hasnt-told-us-many-migrants-sick/>.

³ Catherine E. Shoichet, “People with coronavirus are crossing the US-Mexico border for medical care,” *CNN*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/29/health/border-hospitals-coronavirus/index.html>.

Particularly, we request that DHS provide updated answers to the following:

1. How is U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) currently defining “essential travel”?
2. Are aliens with Border Crossing Cards (BCC) automatically admitted into the U.S., and if so, why are they deemed “essential”?
3. If aliens with BCCs are not automatically admitted into the U.S., under what circumstances are they deemed “essential” and admitted?
4. What steps is CBP taking to prevent COVID-positive aliens from entering the U.S.?
5. How many aliens with BCCs have been admitted into U.S. health care facilities for COVID-19 treatment?

Our policies are only as good as their enforcement, and we cannot afford to undermine their effectiveness – especially with lives, resources, and the wellbeing of our nation on the line.

We must implement and subsequently enforce common-sense measures to limit the spread of this highly contagious virus and are hopeful that your department will focus aggressively on our border states and localities.

Sincerely,

Brian Babin
Member of Congress

Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress

Mo Brooks
Member of Congress

Scott Perry
Member of Congress

Tom Tiffany
Member of Congress

Rick W. Allen
Member of Congress

Randy K. Weber
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